DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 332 264 EA 021 079

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TITLE	The Dailiness of School Collaboration.
SPONS AGENCY	Connecticut State Dept. of Education, Hartford.
PUB DATE	Apr 89
NOTE	22p.; An activity of the Connecticut Principals' Academy. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the New England Educational Research Organization (Portsmouth, NH, April 26-28, 1989).
PUB TYPE	Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Collegiality; *Cooperation; *Cooperative Planning; Coordination; Educational Cooperation; Elementary Secondary Education; *Group Unity; Interpersonal Relationship; *Teamwork
IDENTIFIERS	*Connecticut Principals Academy; *Connecticut State Department of Education

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses an experiment-in-progress that focused on an investigation of novel school collaboration procedures. Two schools participated in the experiment. The principals of these schools were asked for their definition of "collaboration" and a metaphoric description of their schools. Following a collaborative skills workshop, tasks that required participant collaboration were simulated by the experimenters. Participants included the principals and volunteer teachers, who kept in mind the definitions and metaphors that were created to describe collaboration in their respective schools. Then real tasks were created. The results from the observations merit a continuation of the experiment. The evolution of collaborative efforts is evident in: (1) the transition from individual to cooperative team efforts; (2) the institutionalization of collaborative endeavors; (3) the transference of collaborative initiatives coming from the experimenters or the consultants to the participants or the collaborators; (4) a growth of teachers' sense of efficacy as a result of satisfactory process and task outcomes; and (5) the transference of collaborative strategies to other groups outside the experiment for the purpose of socializing them within schools. (JAM)

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THE DAILINESS OF SCHOOL COLLABORATION

A Presentation of the New England Educational Research Association
April 26-28, 1989

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An activity of the Connecticut Principals' Academy
funded with an award from the
Connecticut State Department of Education

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THE DAILINESS OF SCHOOL COLLABORATION

by Helen B. Regan

This paper describes an experiment-in-progress. Supported by the Connecticut Principals' Academy of the Connecticut State Department of Education, it was called in its first year, The Teacher-Principal Collaborative Leadership Project, and now in its second year, the Staff Empowerment Project. Today I am presenting the paper under the title "The Dailiness of School Collaboration." My choice of this title, in fact this entire presentation, is actually part of the experiment as I try out a first public description of what my colleague, J. Patrick Howley, and I are doing, and how we are tentatively interpreting the outcomes. I hope to receive some direction and focus from your responses as Pat and I continue to consider the most appropriate forum and format through which to communicate our work.

In preparing this paper I have tried to strike a balance between giving a broad enough overview so that the audience can appreciate the scope of the project, and providing enough detail so that the audience can also appreciate the 'dailiness of collaboration', something which requires detail to have meaning. In the interest of time, and assuming the audience knows as much or more about it than I, I have altogether omitted the literature base in which this paper is grounded.

The last section of the paper describes our tentative interpretations and invites others from the audience.

Introduction

"Let us insiders and outsiders, understand and honor the daily life in schools," exhorts Ted Sizer in a piece entitled "Dailiness." "School folk," he goes on, "often take swift and appropriate umbrage at outsiders who neither understand nor respect the rich dailiness of their work, who see education's faults as system problems only, and who undervalue the often serendipitous spontaneity of an effective school" (Sizer, 1988).

This paper is about the dailiness of school collaboration. It takes the micro world of day to day school life seriously. It has as an underlying premise that people interested in purposively collaborating around their work in schools, principals and teachers alike, need to know how to go about it in a way that accommodates, even capitalizes on, the rich dailiness of school life.

We began this project not knowing much more about the dailiness of school collaboration than anyone else. Because the concept of meaningful professional collaboration between principals and teachers is so new, no one has much experience in making it happen. So we began with the idea that we would try it, expecting to learn from experience as we went along. Here we offer a description of what we, and our colleagues in the schools, thought and did. The result, we believe, is a

portrait of the dailiness of school collaboration useful, we hope, to others who like us believe in the potential of collaboration between principals and teachers to enrich schools for everyone, but are unsure how to make it happen. So this paper is about an experiment; how do you collaborate with one another from day to day?

We see this project at its essence as a teaching and learning experience for all of us participating in it and so it becomes important to describe our concepts of teaching and learning. We believe that experience plus organizers equals meaning. Meaning is the ultimate outcome of learning; experience and organizers are the main components of teaching which lead to learning. We see organizers as a structure imposed by the learner on experience. This structure can become manifest in two ways, either revealed by the teacher, or personally created by the learner.

We, the authors, designed the experiment and then sought out school practitioners to join us in implementing it. The school practitioners were two teams, each consisting of the principal and six or seven teachers, from two different high schools. The project design required the teams to identify a task or event in their school which they would work on collaboratively for a year in consultation with us. The task or event would be the experience, and we, consultants as teachers and learners, would assist in providing the organizers of that experience by facilitating discussion about collaboration around the task. Sometimes we would "reveal" the organizers by

drawing on our knowledge; other times the organizers would be created by any or all of us on the spot. That's what an experiment is, discovering as you go along.

Getting Started

With the assistance of The Principals' Academy, we advertised an awareness meeting open to any school in the state. Our intent was to explain the project and secure a commitment from one or two schools for year long involvement. We began the awareness session by asking the participants to generate definitions of what collaboration is. We recorded what they said on newsprint sheets, and we included our own contributions. Taking part in activities in this way is one way for us to become part of the group.

As a trust building activity, we next asked each participant to invent and then describe a metaphor for his or her school. "My school is a hot air balloon concealed in a large box with an open top," said one principal. "It is actually quite colorful, but no one can see that because of the box. The balloon is not tethered, but it does not take off because the basket is filled with bricks. I see myself having just scrambled on board and struggling to throw out the bricks. I want the balloon to take off so everyone can appreciate the beauty of its colors, but the bricks are very heavy. I'm going to have a hard time throwing them out by myself."

"My school is an exuberant marching band," said another principal. "Its playing enthusiastically and marching off up a hill. Everyone has on a colorful uniform. But the uniforms are a little askew and the players are not all together. I'm up on the hill watching and I can't decide what to do. If I'm the band

leader maybe I should get out in front and set the tempo and the direction for the march. But I can't see them when I'm in front, and I worry that I'll lose touch with their talent and enthusiasm. Maybe I could be more effective coordinating things from the top of the hill, but I'm not sure how to get my message across from that spot."

We designed these two activities, compiling definitions of collaboration and creating metaphors, to achieve our goals of causing the participants to communicate with one another on a more intimate level than usual, and to experience collaboration. We pointed out to the groups that the shared understandings of their schools as revealed through their metaphors had been achieved by use of several elements of their definition of collaboration such as airing issues, working together to explore, listening. "You have," we said quite explicitly, "experienced collaborating together."

The Schools

The hot air balloon and the marching band became the schools of the first year of the project. The metaphors convey an impression of each of them which is amazingly accurate. The hot air balloon is a suburban school which had a reputation as a lighthouse in the 60s. In the the ensuing twenty years the community has lost some of its status, the school's reputation for excellence has faded into the memory of a greying faculty, the facility has aged, the relations between faculty and

administration have become distant, if not hostile. The principal was in just his first year. It was himself he was describing as just climbing on the hot air balloon, representing the halcyon days, and wanting intensely to dump the bricks, representing the baggage preventing return to flight.

The second school is literally brand new. It's located in a rural town which is one of two towns which came together in the mid 70s to form a regional secondary district where none had existed previously. Prior to the formation of the district the students from each of the two towns had gone to the high school of different contiguous towns. The faculty had been hired anew from everywhere and had enjoyed the excitement of beginning something from the beginning. That excitement still lingers, as the exuberance of the marching band illustrates. Also still lingering is the lack of focus created in a new school where there is no history, no stories, no heros or heroines in the folklore of the school to anchor people in a shared heritage. The skewed uniforms and slightly off beat play of the band convey this feature of the school. The principal is only the second in the school's history and has been there only a few years.

The Launch

Next came the planning for the first joint collaborative skills workshop for the two schools enrolled in the project. Our overall goal was to teach the schools some group process skills

which we believe are essential for collaborative group functioning. We needed a way to do this, however, which was not didactic, but rather honored our belief that the best teaching and learning, particularly for adults, comes through examined experience.

We designed a fishbowl model where first one school tackled a simulated group task observed by the other and then vice versa. At the conclusion of each group's work, the observers were asked to identify examples of collaboration they had seen in action. The simulated task also served as our vehicle to introduce studied reflection into the project. We distributed notebooks to each participant, describing them as journals to be used to record insights, suggestions, learnings, criticisms. At the end of each team's work on the task, we asked participants to answer the following questions in writing in their journals: 1) What behaviors helped or hindered accomplishing the task?, 2 What role did you play? We asked the observers to answer the same questions. Before we began the general discussion of the experience, we asked participants to read their journal entries as a way of planning their contributions to the discussion. Thus we had created both an experience and the examination of the experience.

From collaboration around a simulated task, we moved to collaboration around a real task. We asked each team to meet and come up with a formal definition of the task they would address in their school during the project, spell out several

short term objectives including target dates, and set the next meeting time of the team.

The hot air balloon team left the awareness session with a commitment to designing their project around space needs in their school. A new library was under construction at the school the completion of which would soon free up a large space in the school previously occupied by the old library. There was no faculty room in the school, and teachers literally felt they had nowhere to go for either professional or relaxation purposes. Every classroom was scheduled every period of the day. So the teachers had a great interest in claiming the soon-to-be vacated space for their needs.

The marching band team had several tasks under active consideration at the end of the awareness session, but settled on an analysis of Project READ. The principal had described the unfortunate events surrounding Project READ. A committee of teachers and the principal had been meeting to discuss ways of implementing a school goal to increase student reading. This goal was one of several which had been formulated by an overall school goals committee which had reported out to the faculty, and whose work the faculty had accepted. The Project READ committee had decided to implement a one period/week mandatory school-wide reading period. When the committee reported its decision to the faculty at a late spring faculty meeting, announcing that the new reading period would start in the fall, there was, as the principal said, " a firestorm of protest." The committee decided as a result to delay

implementation of the idea. The principal described this situation as an example of collaboration gone awry. He had not anticipated and did not understand the intensity of the negative faculty reaction to Project READ.

Riding in the Hot Air Balloon and Parading with the Marching Band

Our experiences with the hot air balloon and the marching band unfolded in four categories. First, there were the team meetings, most of which we attended, although not all. Generally we were observers at these meetings, describing at the end the collaborative behavior we had just seen in action in front of us. Occasionally we would intervene as the meeting was in progress. After the meetings, we sent a reflection paper to the team members in which we expressed the results of our further consideration of the meeting. Second, although we could see the development of the teams unfolding in front of us during the team meetings, we also wanted to know how the team members individually saw these developments. . So we planned interview questions in three categories: What has been happening?, what impact have events had on you and the school, and what is your assessment of the value of everything that's happened? We call this category "taking the pulse."

Third, we felt the need for closure as the school year ended. It seemed important for all of us to look backwards over the year's involvement in the project with the conscious

goal of articulating what we learned from it. We call this "summing up."

Fourth and finally there was the category of the unexpected. We had originally designed the project to last for one year, but it is now in its second year with both of the original schools continuing and two new schools joining the project. The next section of the paper describes our illustrative experiences from the first three of these categories.

A Team Meeting of the Hot Air Balloon

What follows is a description, including verbatim, of an early meeting of the hot air balloon team, and an excerpt from a reflection paper we wrote after the meeting. The names used throughout are pseudonym.

Flo said, "Back to my notes. I have here that Lenny had a set of short term objectives. Why don't you write them on the board?" Lenny did so. Next Ned, a graphics teacher, offered to distribute some sketches he had done of space reallocation incorporating the results of a survey the team had done earlier of the faculty about their space needs. And so began a discussion of several hours out of which came the next meeting date, tasks for individual members to complete before that meeting, and group agreement on the goal of their project. We ended the meeting by asking the participants to write in their journals: 1)Do you think the group functioned

collaboratively? Can you cite examples; 2) What role did you play?

Excerpt: Reflection Paper 1: WORKING TOGETHER TO EXPLORE

"Working together to explore" is a phrase I took from the list of definitions of collaboration that we generated together at our first meeting. This phrase struck me as an accurate and complete description of your last team meeting. The essence of the meeting was thorough and extensive discussion of data about renovation possibilities, i.e. exploring together. The result of the discussion was twofold:

1. Task - As a group you achieved greater understanding about the dimensions of your task. You arrived at this understanding in

common so that all of you now have the same informational base from which to work. You achieved this through public discussion of Ned's tentative plan and by public enumeration of the survey results which had been handed to Sam . Joyce expressed this during our debriefing when she said, "I feel greater clarity. It helped to see it all visually."

2. Process - The development of a common understanding of the dimensions of the task through extensive discussion in which you all participated led to your first feelings of group identity and cohesion. Lenny expressed this when he said during the debriefing, "We're no longer individuals working separately. We've become a group of people working toward a common goal." Ellen echoed this feeling when she said, "We worked together better... There was more equality."

Taking the Pulse of the Hot Air Balloon at Mid-Year

What follows are selected responses to one of the eight questions asked: Could you describe the evolution of collaboration in this project? Has there been any significant turning point in its evolution that you can describe?

Two of the seven team members mentioned the "launch" of the project, i.e. the joint meeting where each team performed a simulated task and then received feedback on their collaboration, as a significant event. Sam, the principal, said, "I noticed that Lenny developed a strategy to help the group problem solve. I felt I had to provide the leadership

initially, but I pulled back because I saw that what he suggested was going to work better than what I wanted to do. That was hard for me. I still have to remind myself that I may not necessarily be the best leader for whatever task is going to take place." Ned said, 'The exercises you had us do gave me personally a little more insight into how some other people operate. ....what I try to do (now) when dealing with these people is to work to their strong point as opposed to just seeing things from my point of view all the time."

Several had noticed the same process of team development that we had been seeing. Lenny described it this way, "The first couple of meetings focused in on what the whole process would involve and what the role of each of us would be. Gradually what happened was that the roles we had began to disappear and we began working as a team with everybody having equal input. That's what collaboration is all about. The main thing is that natural barriers that exist within any school situation gradually begin to disappear. ....Each person brings certain qualities and experiences that will eventually begin to meld to bring the thing together."

Sam, as the principal, had a unique experience. He described a significant turning point which occurred at a meeting when he had to leave early. The team had been planning the faculty meeting at which they would present their initial plan for the renovation for comment and suggestion. Sam left the meeting expecting to make the faculty presentation, but the next day Flo told him the group had decided he was not

the best person to make the presentation. They had given the task to Joyce. Sam said, "My feelings were kind of hurt. I thought I was the best person to run the meeting, but as I thought about it I realized I wasn't. The group was feeling that I was catching heat because this was Sam's group, these people are his pets, and they're going to do whatever he says. They thought it was better symbolically to run the meeting. It ended up the meeting was wonderful, far better than I could ever run. I learned alot from that. When I left that planning meeting, a different kind of collaboration occurred. They felt OK to make the decision. It's interesting that they felt strong enough about their perception of me that they could kick me out of the picture. If we're going to have models to help leaders solve problems, the goal is that the group functions without the formal leader present. That's a pivotal point I think."

Examination of these responses confirms our sense of development of the team. Each member sees him or herself as one among equals, each with something of value to contribute to the group. They have developed the ability to lay aside their own perspective temporarily to hear accurately what the contribution of their fellow team member will be.

Summing Up

By the time we came to summing up at year end, we had heard that our proposal for a second year had been accepted.

Rather than bringing the project to a close as we had expected to be doing, we were instead taking another 'mid-point' reading. We decided to ask two questions to elicit information to guide us in second year planning: what had been the most important learning for each team member?, and how we had been most helpful as consultants? We report the responses of both teams clustered around themes.

Many participants talked at length about what they had learned about communication. Lenny said, "...to sit down and talk with other colleagues and talk about something important to us, to make a plan and to start to implement the plan. That this process of collaboration, working together in trial and error, then seeing a pattern emerge, cutting down on the time it took to get things done. We learned to communicate better."

Marcia said, "I've learned about the importance of communication. That was the the problem with Project READ. We should keep it (better communication) up here." Martha added, "Lack of communication leads to resentment."

Others spoke of what they learned about how to communicate. Jack said, "I usually get my input because I always get involved. What changed is that my input is more carefully planned and is more generally accepted. Rather than make so much noise, I check all the bases first. I knew about that, but now I do it." Marcia described how she has transferred what she's learned about communication to other settings, "I saw the fruits (of improved communication) on

other committees. I transferred the process. I watched time better."

Still others spoke of an increased sense of efficacy. Joyce said, "An important learning for me has been the fact that this project could be done, that people in the system took our work seriously. It looks like we will succeed in the project." Flo added, "I've learned that change is possible. I want to see this expanded. There is alot of cynicism in the building, and as more people get involved, there will be less of it." Marcia said directly, "We took greater control for the project."

Another theme sounded by the newcomer in each group speaks of deeper understanding of their environment and a greater sense of belonging. "I know where to go now when I really disagree with something. My new understanding makes for a better work environment", said Peter, a first year teacher. Rick, new to his school, said, "I've learned about the school and about relationships between professionals."

We asked how we as facilitators had been helpful. Two themes emerged from the answers to this question: keeping them on track, and serving as a mirror feeding them information about themselves that they otherwise could not have seen. Ellen expressed both themes by saying, "Keeping us on the collaborative tack was important. Helping us fulfill all of the roles of the collaborative group and communicating with the larger community. (The consultants) could be more objective; they made us think about the process as well as the goal."

When asked how we could best be of use to the teams in the second year, all responses focused on aspects of institutionalizing collaboration. Sam expressed this idea by acknowledging that at some point the team needed to own its process just as it owns its task. "Teach us," he said. "Teach us a dimension of the model so we can constantly evaluate ourselves. We need to insure a way for the group to look at ourselves."

In reviewing these responses we identified our goal for the second year: to transfer responsibility and skill from making intervention that facilitates collaboration from us the consultants to them the collaborators.

Making Meaning

We are initially conceptualizing the task of making some meaning out of the events I have just described to you through our learning definition: E + O = M. The project is the experience in this case, and the task of making meaning requires imposing an organizing structure on the experience. This task is very much still in process. Neither time nor the stage of development of our thinking permit full development of any of possibilities which have occurred to us; here I will list some concepts, more or less elaborated, which may prove fruitful as structures for making meaning of the experience of the project:

1. The project has engendered increased teachers' sense of efficacy.

2. Group commitment to working through the task together has led to satisfactory process and task outcomes even when the goals were not always evident; also called by some participants 'trusting the process.'

3. Participants regarded consultants as team members because their status as outsiders effectively insulated them from the influences of past history, and allowed them to intervene in situations that others could not.

4. We as consultants, although we did not plan it specifically, now see that we 'modeled the model', i.e. we worked collaboratively with each other in planning and implementing the project. We wonder about the influence of such "meta-modeling" on the direction of the project.

5. Teachers have transferred some collaborative strategies learned in the project to their classrooms and to other groups.

6. The project has contributed to wider community building throughout the schools as the teams have interacted with the larger faculty.

7. The way the teachers experience the project is a function of their level of professional development. Less experienced teachers see the project as a profound learning experience; more experienced teachers see it as affirmation of previously established ways of working.

7a. For less experienced teachers the project functioned as a significant socializing device through which they earned acceptance in their schools, learned about its

norms, and established a mutually respecting relationship with their principal. These teachers valued this experience highly.

8. Learning about collaboration, and increased skill in practicing it, occurred because the teaching and doing were grounded in the daily lives of the participants through the task they selected themselves. Trying to discuss collaboration in the daily life of schools without connection to the daily life of those schools is akin to an animal without a skeleton - just a shapeless blob.

We are looking for comment about the any aspect of the project. Most particularly we are interested to know from fellow educators what meaning, if any, they see in what has happened so far. We solicit critiques of the meanings we listed here, and we welcome suggestions about how to weave these bits of meaning into a coherent whole that would be interesting and useful to other educators.